

Speech from ADHUM at the UN Forum on Minority Issues in Geneva (25-26 November 2014)

Madame President,

I am here today representing ADHUM, short for the Association for the Promotion of Human and Minority Rights, created in Brussels in the summer of 2013, in light of the need within Belgium to actively defend human rights and particularly minority rights. Unfortunately, aside from German speakers and Flemish speakers from Brussels (and good for them!) minorities are not respected today in our State of Belgium.

Bearing in mind the theme of this Forum, which is to identify violence against minorities, I should say that there aren't killings or atrocities in Belgium, thank goodness. However, and even if this already long ago (1970), we cannot forget the death of the French militant Jacques Georgin after he was severely beaten by Flemish extremists during an election campaign.

Apart from this, cases of less extreme violence admittedly happen in the Flanders region. They often consist of disruptive protests (between 50 and 3000 people) using placards, firecrackers, throwing eggs or paint, hostile outbursts, tagging official buildings (such as communal houses, cultural centres of French schools), sometimes tagging the homes of French speaking political figures and sometimes harassing people such as Mayors and municipal councillors, as well as entering and encroaching on their private homes and gardens for a period of time.

Admittedly, most of the time the Police in Flanders, made up exclusively of Flemish policemen, do take action when they are called out, but they always do so languidly, to control the situation, separate Flemish and French-speakers, prevent fights, but without ever obstructing demonstrations and almost never proceeding to arrests. What's more, extremist Flemish groups are almost never banned from protesting. It isn't always the case, far from it, when French speakers themselves are requesting to hold demonstrations!

Therefore, Flemish demonstrations against French speakers, which are tolerated and controlled, still cause injuries or damage to property. This spreads fear among French speaking minorities in Flanders and is believed to indeed be the Flemish objective, according to many French speakers who aren't go out to attend meetings organised for them (these are sometimes simple cultural or festive gatherings). From the Flemish authorities, this is a skillful and complicit technique to deter French speakers from gathering and expressing their culture or politics and in this way, aiming to silence their voice. The authorities therefore count on French speakers becoming discouraged and subservient (accepting becoming assimilated).

In short, in a *de facto* complicity with radical extremist Flemish groups (such as the T.A.K, the Voorpost or the V.V.B), Flemish authorities and their police are thus developing a 'soft' oppression against French speaking minorities, instead of fulfilling their democratic duty to protect and respect the rights of French speaking minorities living in Flanders, especially, but not exclusively on the outskirts of Brussels.

In order to understand, one should know that the prevalent official and political dogma in Flanders, against historical and rational evidence, is that there is not and cannot be a French speaking minority (these people should accept to be assimilated). Therefore, there is no discussion among the Flemish regarding the recognition of the existence of a French speaking

minority entitled to their language and culture being respected, and entitled to officially and publicly practice them, potentially with public subsidies...

At the local level however, in numerous towns, especially those close to Brussels or the linguistic border, French speakers nominate candidates to elections, are elected representatives and in some cases even gain the majority vote... But this majority is denied and persecuted... Their Mayors are not recognised or even not officially named, except where they commit to only using the Dutch language. Also, there were 5 French speaking elected members of the Flemish Brabant Provincial Council which certainly proves that a large presence of French voters exists in the Flanders area! The Flemish majority does not however draw any reasonable conclusions regarding the respect owed to the language and culture of its citizens...

At the regional level, it is worth noting the obvious under-representation of French speakers in Flanders who only have one representative out of 124 in the Flemish Parliament, despite making up 5% of the population. Conversely, the Flemish minority in Brussels is significantly over-represented in the Brussels Parliament... thanks to a legally guaranteed presence (17 seats out of 89) regardless of the number of votes cast, which amounts to almost 20% of seats despite the fact that in the Brussels Region the number of Flemish inhabitants is less than 10%!

Therefore, the first form of violence occurring in Belgium (in Flanders) against French speakers, is an institutional form of violence exercised by the Flemish political majority diktat over the Belgian parliament and also inevitably, the Flemish Parliament. This violence is shown through inaction, denial, and the refusal to officially recognise the existence and the rights of the French speaking minority in Flanders. This minority does exist however: there are at least 300,000 French speaking Belgian citizens in Flanders...

This violence mainly ensues from an unjust law from 1962 that established Belgian regions as officially unilingual, except some minor exceptions for certain municipalities near the linguistic border or the Brussels-Capital region, called municipalities "with facilities", but where continuous Flemish political pressure aims at reducing these facilities and ultimately removing them. Flemish political parties refuse to open their eyes and hearts to UN contemporary rules regarding the protection of national minorities. However, "linguistic territoriality" as in the 1962 law, imposed by Flemish parties without sufficient exceptions, are in direct breach of the democratic principles of the UN, especially the necessary respect for linguistic minority rights. This law exerts unacceptable pressure on French speakers in Flanders and serious discrimination between citizens of the same State.

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